"Writing from Extreme Edges": Pakistani English-Language Fiction

Cara Cilano

In 2000, Shafiq Naz founded Alhamra, a small press in Islamabad, Pakistan. Driven by Naz's desire to contribute to the modest publishing industry in Pakistan, on the decline since the 1960s and 1970s, and by his love for languages and literatures, Alhamra publishes primarily fiction in English and also reprints books in English and Urdu. In addition to publishing critical work edited by Alamgir Hashmi and the short fiction of Tariq Rahman, two well-established names in Pakistani letters, the press's most distinguishing feature is its commitment to publishing emerging writers from Pakistan. Naz sees value in publishing new writers, such as Bina Shah, Sehba Sarwar, and Sorayya Khan, all of whom have been educated and/or reside outside of Pakistan. These new literary voices, Naz contends, are attracting a younger generation of Pakistani readers who have an interest in contemporary literature written in English. In 2006, Alhamra established the *Alhamra Literary Review,* which, according to the press's website, means "to showcase new and emerging literary talent in and of Pakistan, as well as to introduce its audience to established figures in Pakistani literature through translations and excerpts from great works." The press has plans to publish the *Review* annually.

Alhamra's Pakistani audience for its English-language production is, as far as the press can determine, made up of educated people with an age range of 20–40. The age of Alhamra's readership means that, in terms of Pakistani history, these readers were born *after* Partition and, most, *after* the 1971 civil war that resulted in Bangladeshi independence. The audience's age is significant for obvious reasons: here are two generations of readers who articulate Pakistani identities that draw upon the country's past *after* independence and upon its multi-ethnic present (Naz).[1]

While there is a growing audience in Pakistan for such literature itself, Naz observes that, in terms of distribution of Alhamra's English-

language fiction outside of Pakistan, publishers in Europe and America "aren't really interested because these stories [published by Alhamra] don't really fit their concepts of Pakistan." The sort of thing that may catch a non-Pakistani's eye, in Naz's estimation, would in reality be sensational, reductive, and stereotypical:

> In America and the Anglo-Saxon world, the problem is that people have certain ideas and preconceptions about Pakistan, about Islam …. Anything that is negative, anything that would corroborate what they think about a certain society, that would interest them. They are not really interested in portraying the society as it is with its negative and with its positive.

This assessment shows how difficult it is to gauge international marketability. Publishing in English does not automatically guarantee a global audience.[2] Further, taking into account Naz's estimation of what does appeal to non-Pakistani audiences, Pakistani literature in English may not (or no longer) inherently or even self-consciously mirror colonial sensibilities simply because these works are written in English. If such is the case, then English as a medium of creative composition may produce a literature that does more than perpetuate a colonial mindset.

Naz's assessment of the press's audience for and authors of English-language writings suggests such literature occupies an "emerging" position within Pakistan. At the same time, English-language literature by Pakistani authors, particularly those of a younger generation, barely registers on the radar screens of the international literary field referred to as "world/new literatures in English." In light of this doubly tenuous position, Muneeza Shamsie argues that Pakistani authors "choosing English as their creative medium … write from the extreme edges of both English and Pakistani literature" (*Changed* xiv).[3] It is precisely the tenuousness of Pakistani English-language literature's position both within Pakistan and throughout the broader anglophone world that I examine in this article. In an effort to diffuse the defensiveness of a "nativist stance" and the dismissiveness of a "cosmopolitan" one, I propose viewing the works of Pakistan's English-language fiction writers, many of whom have traveled, been educated, or lived outside of Pakistan, as

"Asian global narratives," to borrow Eleanor Ty's phrase, *and* as part of Pakistan's "organic" literary production in order to uncover the critical issues that both link Pakistan's English-language fiction with the country's multi-lingual traditions and connect Pakistan's English-language fiction with the larger field of anglophone literature. In doing so, I follow Alamgir Hashmi's lead, as he wonders in "Poetry, Pakistani Idiom in English, and the Groupies": "The matter should thus make one raise questions not only about a Pakistani idiom in English but also about 'Pakistaniness': what constitutes this, that, and the other? And who may best exemplify these?" (n.pag.)

Alhamra's mission and literary production functions as a microcosm of the key issues, which I arrange under the larger headings of critical reception and critical insights that emerge in Pakistani fiction in English. I look at fiction by several young Pakistani writers, first, to challenge the narrowness of critical reception of English-language literature both within Pakistan and beyond. This challenge primarily involves getting Pakistani writers and their work out from under the shadow of India while also highlighting how this body of work connects to the larger subcontinent, to multi-lingual cultural life within Pakistan, and to the concerns—both national and international—of Alhamra's reading audience, those post-Partition generations in Pakistan. The works of these young Pakistani writers also help me illustrate the critical insights recent Pakistani English-language fiction reveals, especially through its use of English as a language of creative composition. These insights call into question the theoretical ascendancy of a diasporic model of global literatures in English. Instead, they suggest a transnational approach defined in terms of coextensive critical paradigms derived from global and national literary cultures, as well as in terms of linked—rather than simply comparative—historical circumstances.

In terms of critical reception, the topic of Pakistan's English-language fiction has yet to receive very much attention beyond examinations of single authors or texts in "new" literary, as well as South Asian postcolonial, circles. I suggest that Pakistan's proximity to India—the countries' cultural imaginaries and interlocked histories—influence how critics and readers approach Pakistan's English-language fiction. For starters,

Pakistan seems to occupy less cultural space than its larger subcontinental neighbor, India. That is, worldwide anglophone audiences are more familiar with writers claiming Indian citizenship or roots. Entangled with the numbers issue is the fact that several "celebrity" authors self-identify as Indian or as diasporic Indian. Anita Desai articulates just this point in her review of M. Shamsie's first anthology of Pakistani English-language literature, *A Dragonfly in the Sun*. Noting some thematic and stylistic resemblance between Pakistani Zulfikar Ghose and the more famous Indian Salman Rushdie, as well as between the works of diasporic writers from both countries, Desai remarks, "Such similarities can make an Indian reader feel as if one has entered a cave of resounding echoes, or of dazzling mirror images, which spread and expand until they swallow continents and centuries" (21). If the Indian reader is hearing echoes, then the implication is that it is the Indian voice that speaks first and the Pakistani voice that rebounds as the echo.

Desai also marks a distinction between writers from the two countries, however, claiming that "one cannot avoid the conclusion that the imagination of the Muslim writer in Pakistan is linked by Islam to a wider world of ideas, historical and aesthetic, and that there is really no parallel to this in the Hindu writer's situation in India, far more confined to the subcontinent which contains its entire history and tradition" (21). I am uncomfortable with the geo-religious compartmentalization of this claim in that it presents the literary production of Pakistan and India in binaristic terms. Tariq Rahman accounts for the construction of this opposition: "Pakistan is an ideologically inspired state and Urdu was part of this ideology. During the development of Muslim separatism in British India it had become a symbol of Muslim identity and was the chief rival of Hindi, the symbol of Hindu identity" (177). Rahman links Islam with Urdu in Pakistan and Hinduism with Hindi in India and labels such linkages "ideological" since they bolster the antagonisms between Muslims and Hindus in pre-Partition British India and in post-Partition Pakistan and India. Desai's echo metaphor, as well as her Middle East-ward facing positioning of Pakistani literary culture, isolates Pakistan's English-language fiction. This characterization neither acknowledges the uniqueness of Pakistan's Islamic cultural identities nor

the connectedness the country's various cultural traditions have with other parts of the subcontinent.

Further, as Rahman's account shows, Desai's framing of Pakistani culture in Islamic terms also invokes political efforts that have arisen throughout Pakistan's history to define Urdu as *the* language of Islamic cultural production in Pakistan. Such an invocation is immediately subject to an analysis of the power dynamics of Urdu's socio-political dominance. That is, intranationally, the ideologically-motivated linkage of Islam and Urdu asks us to consider issues of language in Pakistan in terms of a wider multi-lingual field that includes English along with regional languages. M. Shamsie expands Rahman's argument about the ideological connection between Islam and Urdu to encompass Pakistan's other languages and ethnicities, explaining, "The concept behind [Pakistan], that of a separate homeland for Muslims, was essentially a transgeographical one as a response to the Muslim demand for political rights in an undivided India. Nevertheless, geography has continued to assert itself in the body politic of Pakistan, creating conflicts of language and ethnicity" (*Leaving* xv). Further, she specifically discusses how this linkage marginalizes writers who compose in English. From an early, post-independence viewpoint, English-language Pakistani literature was, in M. Shamsie's words, "disparaged as pointless, elitist and a colonial hangover" (*Changed* xi). And this despite English being a language of creative and journalistic composition for well over a century and a half (in 1947) in the Indian subcontinent.[4] Desai's comment thus obscures the intranational (Pakistan) and international (Pakistan and India) dynamics of literary production in Pakistan. Beyond the Urdu-English binary, multi-lingualism in Pakistan has a vexed history wherein ethno-nationalisms compete for dominance and/or recognition. One need only consider the build-up to the 1971 civil war between East and West Pakistan to understand how serious the tensions between these ethno-nationalist groups can be. I have lingered on this point not to undermine the centrality of Pakistan's Urdu-language literary tradition but to highlight how any direct alignment of a monolingual (Urdu) literary culture with Islam in Pakistan papers over the conflicts and the richness of contemporary multi-cultural Pakistan.[5]

Even while it is necessary to challenge how India's English-language fiction overshadows Pakistan's, it is also important, in terms of critical reception, to understand how Pakistan's fiction draws upon the historical connections between all of the countries of the subcontinent. Desai's neat bifurcation of Pakistani and Indian cultural production along lines of separate religiously-identified historical and aesthetic traditions, for example, overlooks centuries of overlap that go beyond the shared experiences of British rule. That Mughal rule, for instance, influenced and continues to influence cultural production and national literary imaginations in both Pakistan and India is clear.[6] One recent example of this influence is Mohsin Hamid's first novel, *Moth Smoke* (2000). The novel's prologue relays the story of the Emperor Shah Jahan and his sons in which the old man hears a prediction and later receives confirmation of the violence to which his sons will revert in order to gain his throne. As prophesied, Aurangzeb gains the crown and sentences his eldest brother, Dara Shikoh, to death, presenting his father with Dara Shikoh's head (Hamid 4). The novel also features an epilogue in which Aurangzeb seems to regret the passing of his empire, lamenting the end of a golden age. Aurangzeb, who "*failed at the task of fathering sons unlike himself*," witnesses the disintegration of his empire as his sons wage battles that "*left the victor by his father too frail and too rigid to contain its own people*" (Hamid n.pag.; emphasis in original).

As the structure imposed by a prologue and epilogue suggests, Hamid projects his tale, set in 1990s Lahore, against this Mughal backdrop, hinting at allegorical undertones. In place of crown-lust, Hamid's contemporary characters—Darashikoh (Daru), the central figure especially—desire drugs, Black Label scotch, and Pajeros. And, rather than the threat of literal fratricide, the characters inhabiting Lahore at the close of the twentieth century carry around the anxiety of nuclear conflict with India, a figurative fratricide. The novel's final sentence explicitly draws the two narrative planes together: "*It is perhaps between hope and memory, in the atomized, atomic lands once Aurangzeb's empire, that our poets tell us Darashikoh, the apostate, called out to God as he died*" (Hamid n.pag.; emphasis in original). With its "perhaps" and the tone of uncertainty as to why and if "Darashikoh called out to God as he

died," this closing sentence encapsulates an ambiguity that calls into question the bifurcating issues and claims that have turned the subcontinent into "atomized, atomic lands." In other words, *Moth Smoke* ends by asking readers to consider what happens when the codification of religious differentiation produces antagonistic nations with nuclear capability. Hamid's use of this Mughal story to bookend his novel refuses the isolation imposed by critical receptions such as Desai's. Instead, *Moth Smoke* posits subcontinental commonality and connection.

Like Mughal rule, the 1947 Partition also connects the nations of the subcontinent. In the English-language fiction by the younger generation of Pakistani writers being published today, however, other events and issues eclipse the relevance of Partition in their works. Critical expectations need to be altered, then, to allow for the range of topics this younger generation of writers present. Pakistani author Kamila Shamsie's thoughts on this issue clarify the point:

> [P]ostcolonial studies … seems like a hankering back to 1947 and even pre-[colonial times], when you feel that the problems of your nation are so far past that already. To be entirely frank, when I was in university going to postcolonial classes, I would think, "Why are we talking about this stuff?" It's so not relevant. It might have been relevant to my parents' lives, but we're a completely different generation now. Our vexed relationship with subaltern positions or with the English is just not an issue. That makes you feel … impatient with postcolonial discourse. (Cilano 156)

As a member of a younger generation of Pakistani writers who compose in English, K. Shamsie voices her impatience with postcolonial discourse's seeming fixation on Partition since she views other issues more pertinent to those born into the nation of Pakistan (rather than before the nation was created). Questions of democracy, civil war, ethno-linguistic multiculturalism, Islamization, nuclearization, consumer culture, and extremism, to name just a few, rank high among the sorts of concerns that have gained significance in the decades since Partition. What these concerns do, as K. Shamsie recognizes, is encourage a critical

re-calibration away from predominantly subaltern-focused approaches, including those that treat the English language as exclusively a colonial imposition. As I will proceed to elaborate, these points hint at the sorts of critical insights such fiction offers.

The 1971 civil war that resulted in the creation of Bangladesh is just one example of the events that concern younger Pakistani fiction writers. Sorayya Y. Khan's novel *Noor* (2003/2006), for instance, examines the war's aftermath as a continuation—rather than a cessation—of the ethno-linguistic fragmentation of what remained known as "Pakistan" after the war. The novel carries out this examination through its title character, Noor, a developmentally disabled girl who possesses uncanny artistic abilities, and her mother Sajida. Sajida, a Bengali woman, was brought to Islamabad from Dhaka in 1971 as the "adopted" daughter of Ali, a West Pakistani soldier. Ali's tour had him in East Pakistan for exactly nine months, during which time he killed Bengalis and "gestated" his "ready-made family." By forcing the creation of a family, Ali provides himself with a reason for being; he could "devote himself with renewed energies to being a father—and the sweetest progression thereof—a grandfather" (S. Khan 213). As it is self-consciously constructed, what Ali calls his "ready-made family" represents his reactionary measure meant to construct a "naturalized" domestic location that will secure his identity as a Pakistani man. However, Noor's artwork forces Sajida's suppressed memories of her childhood in Dhaka to the fore, memories that enact Sajida's displacement within Ali's family, thereby shifting her "adoption" to an abduction. Ali's abduction of Sajida makes his "maternity" unnatural and threatens Ali's "ready-made family," as well as the national imaginary of which it is an extension, with disintegration. Ali's gestures at securing an internally harmonious familial structure fail precisely because of his deep reluctance to deal openly with all of the circumstances, the creation of Bangladesh foremost among them, that give shape the realities of that internal, domestic site. Herein lies an allegory of a young nation already bent on forgetting its past.

Another example of the issues that concern contemporary Pakistani writers is Pakistan's vexed relationship with democracy. K. Shamsie's latest novel, *Broken Verses* (2005), takes on issues of censorship and de-

mocracy in the increasingly rigid political and ideological atmosphere of 1980s and 1990s Pakistan. Omi, known as the Poet, is a gadfly character whose writing makes him the enemy of this fictional Pakistan's power-hungry leaders, while Samina, his lover and muse, develops into a firebrand herself, often risking physical harm and imprisonment as she seeks to protest the government's misogynistic policies. Both Omi and Samina are absent in the novel's present. Thus, it is through the stifled memories of Aasmani, Samina's daughter that the novel touches upon the starts and stops of democracy in Pakistan over the past thirty plus years. Aasmani reflects:

> Now it was all in disarray, the religious right talking democracy better than anyone else and insisting, unwaveringly (admirably, I would say, if I didn't recall their political track record), on the removal of the military from power while all the other political parties tiptoed around the matter or see-sawed back and forth; and, on the other side of the equation, the President-General who had been the first head of state in my lifetime to talk unequivocally against extremism was tripping over his own feet in an attempt to create a democratic façade for a government in which the military remained the final authority and the only veto power. (K. Shamsie 73)[7]

As this passage illustrates, the novel's interest in democracy also brings into focus other related issues, including the Army's place in the political life of Pakistan, extremism, and the role in the political sphere of religious parties and organizations in Pakistan. While several of these points connect to Pakistan's contentious relations with India, they also expand outward—to Afghanistan, the US, the Middle East—and inward—to inter-provincial tensions and the difficulties of defining "Islam" in Pakistani political, social, and cultural contexts. By drawing attention to these issues, *Broken Verses* offers many access points into the how recent English-language fiction in Pakistan interacts with life in Pakistan after Partition.

The preceding discussion of *Noor* and *Broken Verses* touches upon several critical access points into contemporary Pakistani fiction, thereby

contributing to the second major focus of my article on the critical insights Pakistani English-language fiction offers. Rather than elaborating further on the above-mentioned access points, though, I want to examine how the fiction I am discussing encourages new insights into the more general critical concepts of diaspora and transnationalism. In different ways, both *Noor* and *Broken Verses* exemplify how English-language literary production in Pakistan contends—implicitly and explicitly—with the status of English in Pakistan. As noted above, K. Shamsie insists that "'Our [younger Pakistanis'] vexed relationship … with English is just not an issue'" (Cilano 156), pointedly dispelling lingering sentiments that English as a language of creative composition remains solely an imposition of colonial rule. In their English-language fictions that deal with ethno-linguistic fragmentation and democracy, as well as other issues, these writers foreground the importance of the position of English in cultural and political spheres without justifying why they are writing in English. Take S. Khan's novel *Noor*, for instance. By problematizing Pakistan's national amnesia regarding the 1971 civil war, S. Khan's novel contests Ashfaq Ali Khan's claim that English in general "stands like a wall between the people and their leaders [and] prevents the understanding of their problems by Pakistanis" (7). A.A. Khan's deeply nationalistic view is that only Urdu can spur the "awakening of the national intellect and spirit, of the upsurge of national resolve, and of the achievement of national independence" (6). Yet, works such as *Noor* exemplify how Pakistani English-language literature engages with Pakistan's struggles over defining itself as a "nation" beyond such exclusivist nationalistic and monolingual rhetoric. This novel, as well as all the others I discuss, poses to Pakistani and global anglophone audiences the question Waqas Khwaja articulates when he asks, what is the status of a literary work "within the socio-cultural context that we loosely term the Pakistani Nation?" (17).

In the same vein, as a novel explicitly concerned with the critical potential of literature and language in a politicized and intermittently repressive public sphere, *Broken Verses* possesses a more explicit self-consciousness over English-language literary production. Aasmani's recollections bring to her mind Samina's protests against the Hudood

Ordinance, a legislative initiative introduced by Zia-ul-Haq in 1979 that, in part, decreed "an accusation of rape could only be proved in a court of law if there were four pious, male Muslim adults willing to give eye-witness testimony" (K. Shamsie 92). In the actual history of Pakistan, the Hudood Ordinance stands as one of the high water marks of Pakistan's English-language press's involvement in the public sphere, particularly by its female journalists. According to M. Shamsie, the English-language press's coverage and critique of the Hudood Ordinance "galvinised educated professional women in Pakistan, particularly lawyers, welfare workers and journalists [such that] they formed the Women's Action Forum which came out into the streets to protest against Zia's laws" (*Changed* xiii). K. Shamsie's incorporation into her fiction of this significant moment in both the English-language press's and Pakistani women's histories reminds readers of Pakistan's English-language writers' long engagement with Pakistani public, political, and cultural life. In other words, such a fictional incorporation legitimizes English-language usage by showcasing its already established "street credibility."

Moreover, *Broken Verses* approaches the topic of English-language literary production from an international perspective, insisting on the benefits of wider influences and connections. The novel fabricates a cross-continental correspondence between Omi and a Columbian novelist by the name of Raphael Gonzalez. Omi describes the relationship: "'Rafael and I have often played games of diving into each other's skin. I send him a fragment of a story in English, our mutual language, and in response he sends me a dramatic monologue, also in English'" (K. Shamsie 38). Part writerly exercise, the game of switching genres—Omi from poetry to prose and Rafael the reverse—suggests both creative and sociolinguistic flexibility and exchange facilitated by the language the two writers share. Further, unlike other instances in the novel where K. Shamsie pulls the non-fictive world into her fiction—the Hudood Ordinance, for instance, and also references to Nazim Hikmet—she apparently invents Rafael, though she may well have had Gabriel García Márquez in mind.[8] Rafael's Columbian-ness places him outside the dominant anglophone world. And, I suggest, there is some significance

to this point. Rather than create a fictionalized John Berger or Kurt Vonnegut, K. Shamsie looks beyond the traditions of British and US literatures. Thus, Omi and Rafael's correspondence puts into play the possibilities of a bottom-up rather than a top-down use of English, promising a creative collaboration into which both writers enter without either having a "native" advantage or a national(istic) attachment.

This writerly exchange, along with my other examples of the treatment of English as a language of composition, suggest a larger point: that the dominant anglophone literary traditions, that is, those of the US and UK, need not circumscribe Pakistani English-language literature, thereby reducing all of this literary production to some staid notion of hybridity or mimicry or leaving these works vulnerable to charges of "inauthenticity." Eleanor Ty offers the notion of "Asian global narratives" in recognition of how hyphenated labels for authors and literatures, born of notions of hybridity, can themselves be inaccurate when writers, including the ones I discuss here, do not necessarily deal with "immigration, citizenship or being caught 'between worlds'" (242). But, there's another side to Ty's concept that is even more germane to the issue of Pakistani English-language fiction. My interest here is to diffuse the often times defensive tones that accompany the labeling of writers and works as "diasporic" by interests "at home" and the marginalizing forces that displace the works of Pakistani-identified writers abroad. In an effort to breach the limits of diasporic discourses, Silvia Schultermandl takes up Ty's "Asian global narratives," to consider nationally-based canonical texts (often in translation), such as Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire,* alongside English-language "Asian global narratives," holding that a simultaneous consideration introduces "multiple paradigms that shape [each field and thus] allow for much more innovative approaches than the […] rhetoric of hyphenated identities solely" (2). Such simultaneity would put a check on any critical impulse to adopt diaspora as the sole and preferred conceptual paradigm. Though obviously a fact of reality, diaspora, when taken as a critical approach, provides a lack of fixity that neatly conveys the fluidity of identity, theoretically, at least. Yet, the theoretically (and usually economically) privileged status of diasporic literary production also obstructs, often on nativist or cosmopolitan

grounds, the inclusion of this literature in discussions of specific geographical and cultural traditions.

It is important to consider, moreover, as Markarand Paranjape does, how diaspora's theoretical ascendancy may amount to a sleight of hand, developing into such a foundational concept that it, too, accumulates the fixedness or essentialism accompanying reductive notions of the homeland. To address this tendency toward conceptual fixedness, Paranjape insists that there is "no 'pure' belonging, no 'pure' diaspora. What we must contend with instead are types of belonging and uprooting, affirmations and denials of identity, sameness and difference" (231). In other words, we need to identify the variables that can link Pakistani English-language literary production within Pakistan's diverse array of multi-lingual literatures, within that subcontinent's English-language traditions, and within the broader anglophone world, as I have been discussing. If I were to give a label to the critical insights I see emerging from the fictions of this younger generation of Pakistan English-language writers, I would describe them as "transnational" in the sense that Inderpal Grewal uses the term. For Grewal, one of the benefits of a transnationalism is that it "include[s] within it a notion of the geopolitical forces that are the condition of possibility" of analysis (17). Such an analysis thus concerns itself with, as Grewal continues, the "linkages between and specificities of cultures rather than [with] similarities" or, I would add, with isolating and putatively inherent oppositions (18). This emphasis on the "geopolitical forces that are the condition of possibility" in relation to Pakistan's English-language literary production necessitates an analysis that looks at the long story of subcontinental cultural and political history, including periods such as the Mughal empire and British colonialism, while also giving consideration to the ideological basis of the nation of Pakistan and the events that follow(ed) from it. With an avowed commitment to acknowledge linkages—rather than focusing solely on isolating divisions—between cultures, histories, and literary traditions, we can more productively and critically understand what contributions English-language literature makes to Pakistani literary culture, as well as to geographically broader anglophone literary cultures.

As a final literary example, Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *Trespassing* (2003) is itself concerned with the "conditions of possibility" that link events—here, paradoxically—a concern that challenges any impulse to isolate. Further, *Trespassing* emphasizes how tendencies toward isolation often work in the favor of those who benefit from power imbalances. The history of the origins of silk production in China introduces the novel's interest in linkages. Dia, one of the novel's central characters, considers how the curiosity of an ancient Chinese empress over some mulberry leaf-eating insects resulted in the discovery of silk:

> Would the empress have squashed the caterpillars if she'd known what would happen twenty-five hundred years after her find? If so, the Sicilians who'd been trying to make silk from spiderwebs wouldn't have kidnapped and tortured their neighbors, the Greek weavers, to elicit their knowledge.
>
> Or what if the empress had seen even farther into the future? Seven hundred years after the agony of the Greeks, history repeated itself. Now it was the Bengali and Benarsi weavers who suffered. If she'd known how the British would chop off the nimble thumbs that made a *resham* so fine it would slip through an ear hole, perhaps the empress would have trampled over the maggots. Then the subjugated nation's exchequer would not have been exhausted importing third-rate British silk. (U.A. Khan 11–12)

Dia's speculations over how the Chinese empress's discovery forged links of greed, subjugation, and trade, as well as of beauty, delight, and sensuousness, establish the silk worms as metaphors of paradox: where there is movement or uprooting, there is also contact and connection; where baseness, also loveliness; where strategic exploitation, also unexpected possibility. A thing as detestable as a maggot produces a thing as winsome as silk.

Against this backdrop of paradoxes, *Trespassing* incorporates references to recent history, illustrating how the impulse to isolate frequently works to shut down challenges to authority or the exploration of complex issues. As a journalism major at a US university during the first

Gulf War, Daanish grows increasingly enraged at what he perceives to be the short-sightedness of the US mainstream press's coverage of the conflict. His own research into "less influential American and foreign papers" helps him write a journal entry plotting out how Kuwait's opportunistic oil production exercised at the end of the Iran-Iraq war, conducted, he claims, "with U.S. approval," may alter the international community's understanding of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Daanish concludes, "All angles of the situation ought to be examined, all parties ought to be included in the debate and the debate ought to be made available to the public" (U.A. Khan 143). His professor responds to the entry by telling Daanish, "'[Y]our role as a budding journalist is to understand that media persons deal in facts, not opinions. Fact: Saddam invaded Kuwait. We cannot change that by asking why'" (U.A. Khan 145). While the professor comes off as more than remiss in his desire to stifle the question "why?" the impulse of the exchange is to shut down, via the professor's authority, the linking of events that stretch considerations of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. In the professor's view, the fact of invasion exists without the need for context, as though its meaning is immutable and all other angles extraneous or distracting; the impulse behind this view is to isolate so as, perhaps, not to implicate in compromising circumstances those players who style themselves heroic in the current conflict.

Another example from the same novel serves a similar purpose, though this instance concerns itself with dynamics within Pakistan. Dia's mother and Daanish's father knew each other in London, where they both attended university. In the heady days of the late 1960s, Riffat and Shafqat thought they shared the same ideals until Riffat mentions that she wants Shafqat to take her to sidewalk cafés when they return to Karachi. First, he tells her she's immature, but later decides, "'Irrational, then. It's not done, Riffat. You can't transport something that exists here to another place.… You know perfectly well it doesn't look good for a woman to eat in those cafés. Men ogle. And if she's with a man, they want to know why he can't shield her from their lust. He looks even worse'" (U.A. Khan 404). Riffat pushes at the logic of his argument, pointing out that he himself wants to "transport" "democracy, health care, and education"

from England to Pakistan. Why, then, "'when women appear in public as frequently and comfortably as men, that's an import? An evil outside influence?'" (U.A. Khan 404). To this question, Shafqat answers, "'Some things will take longer'" (U.A. Khan 404). Just as with Daanish and the professor's exchange, this one features an impulse to block arbitrarily an idea that would otherwise alter the ways men and women would interact in Pakistan. While both the professor's and Shafqat's efforts to block Daanish's and Riffat's views are arbitrary, their efforts are not unmotivated. The professor and Shafqat alike gain personally, professionally, and, in a sense, nationally—in authority, in power, in privilege—by isolating Daanish's and Riffat's movements toward connection, toward rendering explicit the existence of paradoxical situations. These isolating gestures contain and constrain the unsettling questions and issues both Daanish and Riffat want to pose and explore.

Within *Trespassing*'s fictional Pakistan, Riffat's promotion of women's rights complicates Shafqat's intentions to "import" other, seemingly Westernized concepts, such as democracy, health care, and education, to Pakistan. Shafqat's unwillingness to acknowledge the legitimacy of Riffat's perspective signals a greater challenge within Pakistan: namely, the efforts at and resistance to modernizing agendas that are perceived as Western/colonial impositions. Daanish's disagreement with his professor points toward a similar need to understand why resistance mounts when Daanish brings to light linked historical circumstances that may well have contributed to present tensions. Rather than merely diagnosing this condition, however, the critical insights *Trespassing* offers suggest the need to grapple with why these conflicts between what is perceived as "modernized" and what is perceived as "traditional" exist, as well as with how various factions would make use—or not—of historical linkages. In effect, I see these examples from *Trespassing* as calling upon intra- and international connections that shape Pakistan's cultural, political, and social environments, just as Grewal's view of transnationalism holds. This is more than the comparison of similarities; it involves an analysis through connection of how events and issues come into being.

Shafiq Naz's characterization of Alhamra's reading audience may well be applicable to readers within Pakistan beyond those who buy his press's

books. As my overview of these select English-language novels—only one of which, *Noor*, is published by Alhamra—suggests, this younger generation of Pakistani writers display a keen interest in issues, such as democracy, multicultural conflict, extremism, and Pakistan's place in the international scheme of things, that move beyond conventional postcolonial critical foci on Partition and the British colonial legacy. Additionally, this contemporary English-language fiction also promises to frustrate—in a productive way—broader anglophone literary expectations, if Naz's supposition regarding the stereotypical and reductive viewpoints of readers outside of Pakistan has any validity (and I suspect it does). In that the narrative of hybridized immigrant identity does not predominate in these fictions, we as critics have the opportunity to re-think how diaspora as a critical concept needs to change so that we can more fruitfully engage with the work of Pakistani writers who choose to write in English and who may not live their entire lives within Pakistan. I propose viewing Pakistan's English-language literary production as part of its other multi-lingual traditions so as to come to grips with what cultural work this English-language does in such a variegated and complex context. At the base of my proposition is an emphasis on the shared conditions that brought such a multi-lingual situation to pass to begin with, and these conditions weave Pakistan's stories into those of its subcontinental neighbours and those of scores of other peoples, cultures, and nations from around the world.

Notes

1 See Hashmi, Rahman and Haque for discussions of how the 1971 civil war with Bangladesh changed the language situation in the former West Pakistan.

2 By Naz's count, there are roughly ten Pakistani authors who publish internationally; among these, he includes Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, and Bapsi Sidhwa. Their success, Naz concludes, is a combination of talent, the right connections, and good fortune because "publishing is to some extent a roll of the dice" (Naz).

Alhamra's biggest seller is Shafiq and Bilqis Naz's Urdu translation of Antoine de Saint-Exupery's *The Little Prince*.

3 M. Shamsie makes this point in her most recent anthology, *And the World Changed* in reference to the doubly displaced position of Pakistani women writers who compose in English. Yet, I would argue that all Pakistani writers who

use English are similarly "edge-y," and M. Shamsie's introductions to her other anthologies, *A Dragonfly* and *Leaving Home*, implicitly bear out this speculation.

4 Critics generally agree that Sake Dean Mahomed's *The Travels of Dean Mahomed, A Native of Patna in Bengal Through Several Parts of India While in the Service of the Honourable East India Company, Written by Himself in a Series of Letters to a Friend* is the first literary text—it is a travel narrative, as its title suggests—written in English by someone from India. Mahomed published this narrative in 1794. See Fisher.

5 See, for an example in the context of Urdu, Oesterheld who examines, in part, how parodies of Iqbal's poetry, as well as the fiction of Saadat Hasan Manto, problematize the ideological connection of Islam and Urdu.

6 Although most often considered an Indian-American author, Bharati Mukherjee has used the subcontinent's shared Mughal past in her novel *The Holder of the World*. For a critical examination of the cultural functions literary incorporation of the Mughal empire serve in Bengali literature, see Raychaudhuri who contends that "one can trace an inverse relationship between the Bengali litterati's perception of the Mughal empire and their attitude towards British rule, even though this statement implies an excessive simplification" (321).

7 Aasmani's view of Musharraf is eerily prescient given the recent elections in Pakistan (October 2007 and February 2008).

8 K. Shamsie presents Nazim Hikmet as one of Omi's most influential literary forebears (*Broken* 85).

Works Cited

"Alhamra Literary Review." *Alhamra.com*. 15 September 2007 <http://www.alhamra.com>.

Cilano, Cara. "'In a World of Consequences': An Interview with Kamila Shamsie." *Kunapipi: J of Postcolonial Writing and Culture* 39.1 (2007): 150–62.

Desai, Anita. "Englished Diaspora." Rev. of *A Dragonfly in the Sun*, ed. Muneeza Shamsie. *Times Higher Education Supplement* 8 May 1998: 21.

Fisher, Michael H. *The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mahomed (1759–1851) in India, Ireland, and England*. London: Oxford UP, 2000.

Grewal, Inderpal. *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel.* Durham: Duke UP, 1996.

Hamid, Mohsin. *Moth Smoke.* NY: Picador, 2000.

Haque, Anjum Riyazul. "The Position and Status of English in Pakistan." *The English Language in Pakistan.* Ed. Robert J. Baumgardner. Karachi: Oxford UP, 1993. 13–18.

Hashmi, Alamgir. "Poetry, Pakistani Idiom in English, and the Groupies." *World Literature Today* 64.2 (1990). 28 June 2005 <http://0weblinks3.epnet.com.uncclc.coast.uncwil.edu>.

Khan, Ashfaq Ali. "English in Pakistan." *Explorations* 1 (1969): 1–8.

Khan, Sorayya Y. *Noor*. 2003. Alhamra; Wilmington: UNCW Publishing Lab, 2006.

Khan, Uzma Aslam. *Trespassing*. NY: Metropolitan, 2003.

Khwaja, Waqas Ahmad. *Mornings in the Wilderness: Readings in Pakistani Literature*. Lahore: Sang-E-Meel Publications, 1988.

Mukherjee, Bharati. *The Holder of the World*. NY: Fawcett Columbine, 1993.

Naz, Shafiq. Telephone interview. 2 May 2005.

Oesterheld, Christina. "Urdu Literature in Pakistan: A Site for Alternative Visions and Dissent." *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 20 (2005): 79–98.

Paranjape, Markarand. "Afterword: What About Those Who Stayed Back Home? Interrogating the Privileging of Diasporic Writing." *Shifting Continents/Colliding Cultures: Diaspora Writing of the Indian Subcontinent*. Ed. Ralph J. Crane and Radhika Mohanram. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000. 225–45.

Rahman, Tariq. "The Urdu-English Controversy in Pakistan." *Modern Asian Studies* 13.1 (1997): 177–207.

Raychaudhuri, Tapan. "The Mughal Empire in the Bengali Literary Tradition." *J of Islamic Studies* 11.3 (2000): 320–34.

Schultermandl, Silvia. "Against the (Main)stream: New Perspectives on Asian American and British Asian Identity Politics." *Contemporary Asian American and Asian British Literatures*. Ed. Silvia Schultermandl. Spec. issue of *Interactions* 15.2 (Fall 2006): 1–12.

Shamsie, Kamila. *Broken Verses*. Orlando: Harvest Original, 2005.

Shamsie, Muneeza, ed. *And the World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2005.

——, ed. *A Dragonfly in the Sun: An Anthology of Pakistani Writing in English*. Karachi: Oxford UP, 1997.

——, ed. *Leaving Home: Towards a New Millennium: A Collection of English Prose by Pakistani Writers*. Karachi: Oxford UP, 2001.

Ty, Eleanor. "Rethinking the Hyphen: Asian North American and European Ethnic Texts as Global Narratives." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 32.3 (2002): 239–52.